

The Year of the NCO

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The U.S. Army officially kicked off the “Year of the NCO” in January and always has benefited from NCOs who can and do display initiative, make decisions and seize opportunities that correspond with the commander’s intent. These qualities are more important than ever in an Army at war. Despite technological improvements and increased situational awareness at every level, NCOs must make decisions that take advantage of fleeting opportunities on the battlefield.

Today, our Fires Center of Excellence NCOs face challenges that are unlike any in our past. Both field artillery and air defense artillery NCOs execute the full spectrum of operations — stability, support, offensive and defensive operations. And never before have our battlefields been more decentralized, our enemy more ruthless, and never have we had more potential for our NCOs to determine our success as a center and as an Army.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, tactical actions by our NCOs do have strategic consequences. To all of our NCOs in the fight — make no mistake — your actions do have impact. You not only affect those serving on your left and right flanks, but also your fellow NCOs and Soldiers who will follow you in future rotations.

Combatant commanders are relying more and more on the precise and lethal fires that both FA and ADA Soldiers can deliver. Commanders also rely heavily on our fires NCOs to plan, coordinate and synchronize nonlethal fires at all levels.

Our Soldiers are performing traditional and nontraditional tasks brilliantly in Iraq and Afghanistan. These tasks include convoy security, counterinsurgency offensive missions, intelligence gathering, logistical support, forward operating base security and unmanned aircraft systems operations to mention a few. All of these Soldiers and NCOs know they are ambassadors representing their country and the U.S. Army.

Core competency retraining. We continue to ask our NCOs to lead Soldiers doing nontraditional tasks during the current fight. Those missions take our NCOs and Soldiers away from their traditional tasks. Both FA and ADA leadership recognizes that, to maintain the excellence of our NCOs and Soldiers, we must take efforts to address the atrophy in our core competencies. We especially are experiencing a decline in artillery core competencies due both to deploying repetitively on nonstandard missions and to increasing our skill sets to include nonlethal fires.

Our NCO Corps is the envy of professional militaries around the world; others can see the tremendous value of our NCOs’ leadership in current operations. Therefore, we are pursuing initiatives aggressively to regain our edge.

Mobile training teams. Mobile training teams are really a growth industry for us due to the operational tempo and short reset periods between deployments. They are a capability, required today because of the War on Terrorism. If we truly believe in educating our NCOs, we must provide that education at all costs.

Thus far, we have taken some of our NCOs out of the operating force to send them all over the world to conduct training for our fires NCOs. Mobile training teams provide training to NCO leaders

in all of our military occupational specialties. The teams are designed to train the trainer and to develop subject matter experts in each area so units can regain their core skills.

Second, we are using mobile training teams to meet our NCO Education System demands.

Because of the War on Terrorism and deployment schedules, it is difficult to get all of our NCOs into resident NCO Education System classes. Mobile training teams will help meet this demand.

The use of mobile training teams to help Soldiers regain core proficiencies will continue for the foreseeable future. I encourage units to take advantage of these mobile training teams as they reset and as they prepare to execute future deployments.

21st century priorities. The future operating atmosphere undoubtedly will be one of declining budgets and assets. The harsh reality is we will not receive all the resources we need to accomplish the tasks required of us at home and abroad. But there are several priorities we can’t and will not compromise; the first and foremost being, through the Fires Center of Excellence, we will continue to develop competent and confident fires leaders for our Army.

We also will continue to support the current fight by providing the Army with a campaign-quality, expeditionary fires force that is able to operate effectively and efficiently with air and missile defense partners across the full spectrum of operations.

Transformation of the force will continue to be an ongoing effort and will require us to anticipate requirements, tirelessly advocate for additional resources and integrate force application functions to deliver the optimal combination of lethal and nonlethal fires capabilities for joint and maneuver commanders. So we will continue to sustain the fires force by economically managing our resources to support the current fight — reset, retrain and revitalize the fires force in support of Army Force Generation.

Our Army is ever changing and to keep pace, we need to remember the past and the lessons learned from it, but also be ready to engage the future and all its changes fully. And lastly, we will establish and sustain the Fires Center of Excellence as a world-class learning organization with the best Soldiers, leaders, civilians, facilities and equipment.

I am confident that our Fires NCOs will continue these initiatives and continue to fight with professionalism and discipline, and I am certain our reliance on our NCOs will lead to success. I challenge all our Fires NCOs to carry forward this noble tradition — established by NCOs of years past and still alive in the men and women who proudly fight today. Our Army, the field artillery and the air defense artillery depend on it. Here’s to you, NCOs. This is our year to shine more than ever. Let’s work hard to earn our honor during the Year of the NCO.

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